

*Statement presented to the Michigan House Judiciary Committee
Kathleen Blumer, MD, FAAP, May 2, 2007*

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for giving me a chance to testify today on second parent adoption; I'm very pleased to be here.

I have been a practicing pediatrician in southeastern Michigan for just about twenty-five years. My patients come from a big circle from Farmington Hills to Southfield to west Detroit, to Windsor, to Brownstown, to Ann Arbor. They come from just about every ethnic background you can think of, every walk of life and socioeconomic status, and every family configuration. One thing they all have in common is the desire to raise their children the best way they can, and with the greatest stability.

The American Academy of Pediatrics last summer published a report it commissioned on the effects of marriage, domestic partnership, and adoption laws on the health and well-being of children. Current public policy in most states, including Michigan, presents huge challenges to the strength and stability of these families. One of the conclusions of this massive report, gleaned from many excellent studies over two or three decades, is that socially, morally, academically, psychologically, and physically, children from these families fare just as well as children raised by a pair of married parents.

In fact, what causes most harm to the well-being of children is family instability, and I see all too much of this. When the second unmarried parent is legally unable to adopt a child, many difficulties emerge that you may not have thought of:

--if the legal parent dies, the children can be (and are) taken away from the remaining parent who has been raising them and placed with strangers who happen to be biologically related to the deceased parent, or there may be long and confusing (needless) custody battles

--the nonlegal parent may not be able to travel with the child, sign school permission slips, sign them into the ED or the hospital, make next-of-kin decisions for either the child or their partner, enroll them in assistance programs such as Medicaid, crippling their ability to care for the family

--the nonlegal parent cannot put the family on their health insurance

There are great societal and monetary costs to these social policies. Children without health insurance need to get care and immunizations from somewhere. Medicaid, "free" vaccinations from the health department, the state children's insurance fund, charity care from hospitals, all come directly from us via state and federal taxes. Unpaid emergency department care for untended illnesses such as asthma or diabetes or due to inability to pay a primary physician is

enormously expensive. (an ED visit for simple strep costs 4-5 times what a doctor's office visit costs, and our taxes pay that)

Mental health costs need to be reckoned with too. These include teen drop-out rates and school failure, suicide, depression, car accidents, and behaviors very similar to ADHD which end up being treated with expensive medications and expensive extra school personnel. All these conditions occur in much greater numbers in families that are destabilized, either by family events such as divorce or abuse, or by deliberate public policy such as marriage amendments and adoption restrictions for homosexuals. However one feels about unmarried relationships, it is the innocent children, and our own pocketbooks, who suffer when we as a society try to "punish" or "protect ourselves from" the adults who are raising them.

To some of you these families might be an abstraction, or a moral puzzle or outrage. To me these are living, breathing, beautiful children who deserve all the cultural support we can give them. Those of you who are Christian should remember, "whatever you do *to the least of these*, you do to me."

Thank you for your time.

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